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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1155
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T ATHENS 000168

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2018
TAGS: [GR](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [KMPI](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: GREECE TO TELL SYRIA: KEEP OUT OF LEBANON

REF: A. SECSTATE 10786
[1](#)B. ATHENS 165
[1](#)C. SECSTATE 11025

Classified By: A/POLCOUNS JEFF HOVENIER. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (S) On February 5, DepPolCouns delivered ref c points on the arrest of Syrian democracy activists to MFA A6 Middle East Directorate deputy head Giorgos Ayfantis, who said he would pass them to DFM Doukas prior to his trip to Damascus later this week (ref b). On Feb 4, DepPolCouns delivered ref a points on supporting Lebanon to Ayfantis. Ref b reported DCM's February 4 delivery of ref a points to the PM's Diplomat Advisor Bitsios and to MFA General Secretary Agathocles.

[1](#)2. (S) Ayfantis said the ref a points on Lebanon would be useful, both for DFM Doukas's trip and for FM Bakoyannis's participation in the EU-Arab League Summit in Malta next week. As reported ref b, Doukas told us the primary focus of his visit to Damascus was to deliver the message that Syria could enjoy increased trade and business opportunities with the EU if it altered its behavior. Ayfantis said that this referred primarily to Lebanon. "If you want good relations with the West," Ayfantis said Doukas would say, "condition one is to abandon your ambitions in Lebanon." The bottom line would be "Keep out of Lebanon." According to Ayfantis, FM Bakoyannis's message at the EU-Arab League meeting in Malta would be similar, though less direct. She intended to say that Lebanon's "neighbors" needed to stop interfering in its affairs. NOTE: Lebanon has only two neighbors, Syria and Israel. It was unclear from Ayfantis's remarks how much Bakoyannis's criticism of the "neighbors" would extend to Israel as well. END NOTE.

[1](#)3. (S) despite these promises to admonish Syria for its nefarious activities in Lebanon, Ayfantis said the Greek government believed the Syrians were not the decisive factor in preventing the Lebanese government from unifying. This had more to do with internal Lebanese factors and, indeed, the actions -- or inactions -- of the West. The problem was that the Lebanese doubted the promises of assistance and support from the Western countries. Thus, the various Lebanese factions were unwilling to relinquish their prerogatives in favor of a unified government without better assurances and concrete actions from the West to counter Syria. Everyone remembered the civil war, Ayfantis remarked, Syria had a big role but the West was absent. Now, we had to manage Syria carefully. Syria could cause a lot of problems, such as closing the Lebanese border, which would be devastating. But concrete actions by the West -- such as strengthening the army and police -- could be decisive. The Lebanese needed to see the West moving in, he argued, as the Syrians were moved out.
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